

Much has been said about Bruce Lee and his grappling training, technique, skills and its relationship to his art of Jeet Kune Do. However, names of world renowned grapplers such as Gene LeBell, Hayward Nishioka and Wally Jay have always been associated as people who either taught Bruce Lee grappling or trained with him.

EXCLUSIVE

# Bruce Lee's Grappling Secrets

By Abdul J. Tarafdar

Bruce Lee met Jesse Glover when he came to the US in 1959 (aged 19). Jesse was studying Psychology at university and had a background in Judo and Boxing. He was to become Bruce's first student and assistant instructor.

*"Bruce asked if I knew anything about other martial arts. I told him that I had done a little boxing in the Air Force and that I was currently practicing Judo. Bruce said that he wasn't too familiar with either Boxing or Judo, and asked for a demonstration of the latter. I began my demonstration by showing him my favourite throw, Osotogari. When I came in on him to do the throw I expected a little resistance. The*

*speed of the throw and Bruce's lack of resistance caused him to go with it a lot faster than I had anticipated and his head narrowly missed the sharp metal corner of the bed. It was a near miss that could have killed or maimed him, but Bruce showed no reaction. He was impressed with my throwing, but he didn't like the idea of having to hold on to do it."*

*(Bruce Lee Between Wing Chun and Jeet Kune Do: 1976, Jesse Glover)*



As someone who has studied grappling myself I was fascinated by Bruce Lee's grappling skills, especially in his films; *Way of the Dragon* where he uses a neck crank to defeat Chuck Norris, the opening scene of *Enter the Dragon* when he uses an arm bar on Sammo Hung to defeat him in his full contact match. The true idea of cross training, which has surfaced recently due to the UFC and other mixed martial arts contests, could be argued by some to have come of age during the early Seattle years.

On a personal note, having trained with the Brazilian Jiu Jitsu stylists, the Gracies and other UFC competitors previously, I thought that completing a photo shoot and training with Jesse Glover in grappling, which I had previously not intensively done, would be easy, especially considering his age of 69. Upon finishing the photo shoot I realised just how Jesse Glover, as a friend and student of Bruce Lee, was able to inspire him with his skill and knowledge.

# Abdul interviews Jesse Glover

**Abdul J Tarafdar: What year did you first meet Bruce Lee?**

Jesse Glover: I met Bruce Lee in Seattle, Washington in the September of 1959.

**AJT: How old were you both at that time?**

JG: When I met Bruce he was 18 and I was 24.

**AJT: What styles of martial arts had Bruce Lee studied up until meeting you?**

JG: Bruce had studied Wing Chun, the hung, Southern Mantis and parts of other gung fu systems that he was learning from Fook Yueng, a Gung Fu master who also lived and worked at the Ruby Chow restaurant where Bruce lived and worked.

**AJT: What was your martial arts/combat background prior to training with Bruce Lee?**

JG: Before I met Bruce I had practiced Judo and Boxing.

**AJT: Had Bruce Lee heard of Judo or Jiu Jitsu before meeting you?**

JG: Bruce was aware of parallel Chinese arts but he really didn't know that much about Judo.

**AJT: Where and when did you learn your Judo?**

JG: I learned most of my formal Judo at the Seattle Dojo but I had been reading books about it and trying to learn it on my own since I was a kid. I began my formal practice in 1957.

**AJT: What did Bruce Lee like about Judo?**

JG: Bruce liked the rear throws where he didn't have to turn his back to his opponent and he liked the locks, chokes and pins.

**AJT: What elements or techniques did Bruce take from Judo?**

JG: Bruce took throws, chokes, pins and arm bars from Judo.

**AJT: After you, who else did Bruce Lee learn his grappling from during the Seattle period?**

JG: Bruce learned a lot about Judo from Fred Sato and later he took a Judo class at the University of Washington from Chris Kato.

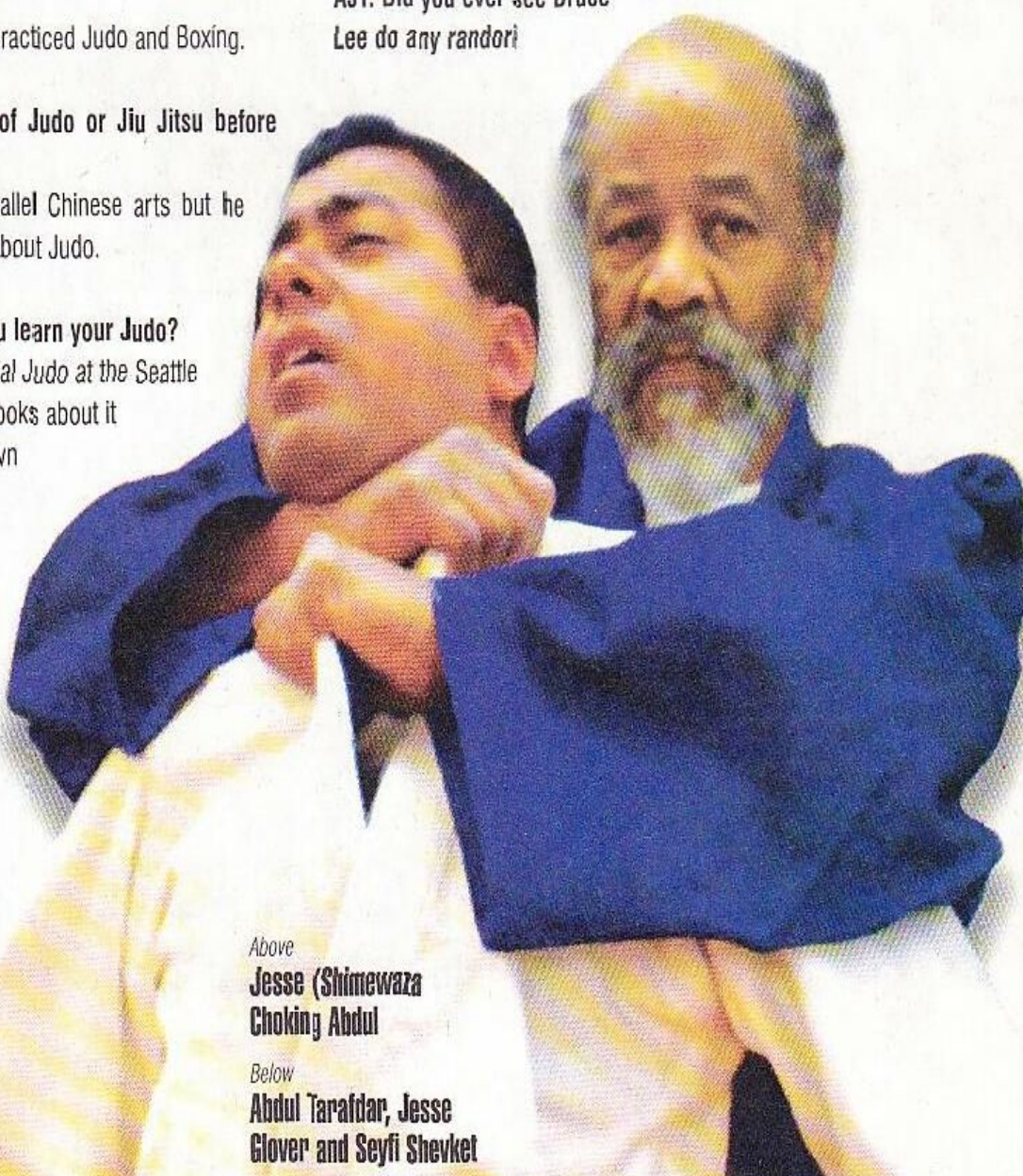
**AJT: Did Bruce Lee ever get formally graded in Judo?**

JG: As far as I know Bruce never had a formal grade in Judo. I have seen pictures of him wearing a Judo Gi and a Black Belt but I doubt that he was ever awarded one.

**AJT: Did he enter any Judo competitions himself?**

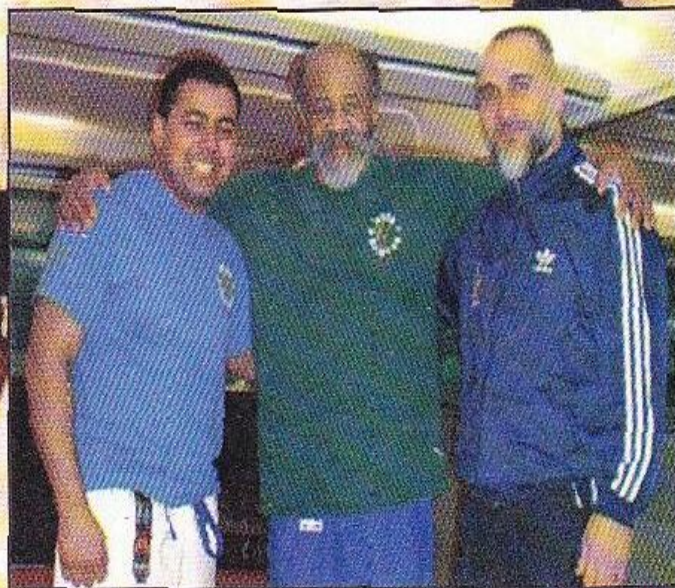
JG: Bruce never entered any Judo competitions that I know of.

**AJT: Did you ever see Bruce Lee do any randori**



Above  
Jesse (Shimewaza  
Choking Abdul

Below  
Abdul Tarafdar, Jesse  
Glover and Seyfi Shevket







(grappling) against any other Judo players?

JG: I did a little randori with Bruce just to show him entry techniques but I never saw Bruce do randori against other Judo players.

AJT: How was his skill at Judo?

JG: Bruce knew and could demonstrate many aspects of Judo in static positions but I am not sure that he really understood Judo's method of off-balancing.

AJT: Do you think that Bruce Lee used the footwork from Judo as a base to further develop his fighting system?

JG: I don't think that Bruce used Judo footwork to further his fighting system but it is one of the core concepts of mine.

AJT: Did Bruce do any no Gi work with you when you worked out in grappling?

JG: Bruce did arm locks, wrist locks and chokes without a Judo Gi.

AJT: What were some of the main grappling styles that Bruce admired or thought were very practical?

JG: Bruce spent a fair amount of time studying all of the major forms of grappling and was familiar with most of the world's greatest grapplers.

AJT: Do you believe that training in grappling styles can complement one's Gung Fu?

JG: Yes, I believe that every martial artist should have some knowledge of grappling.

AJT: What can you tell us about the real life challenge that Bruce Lee received from a Japanese martial artist who held Black Belts in Karate and Judo?

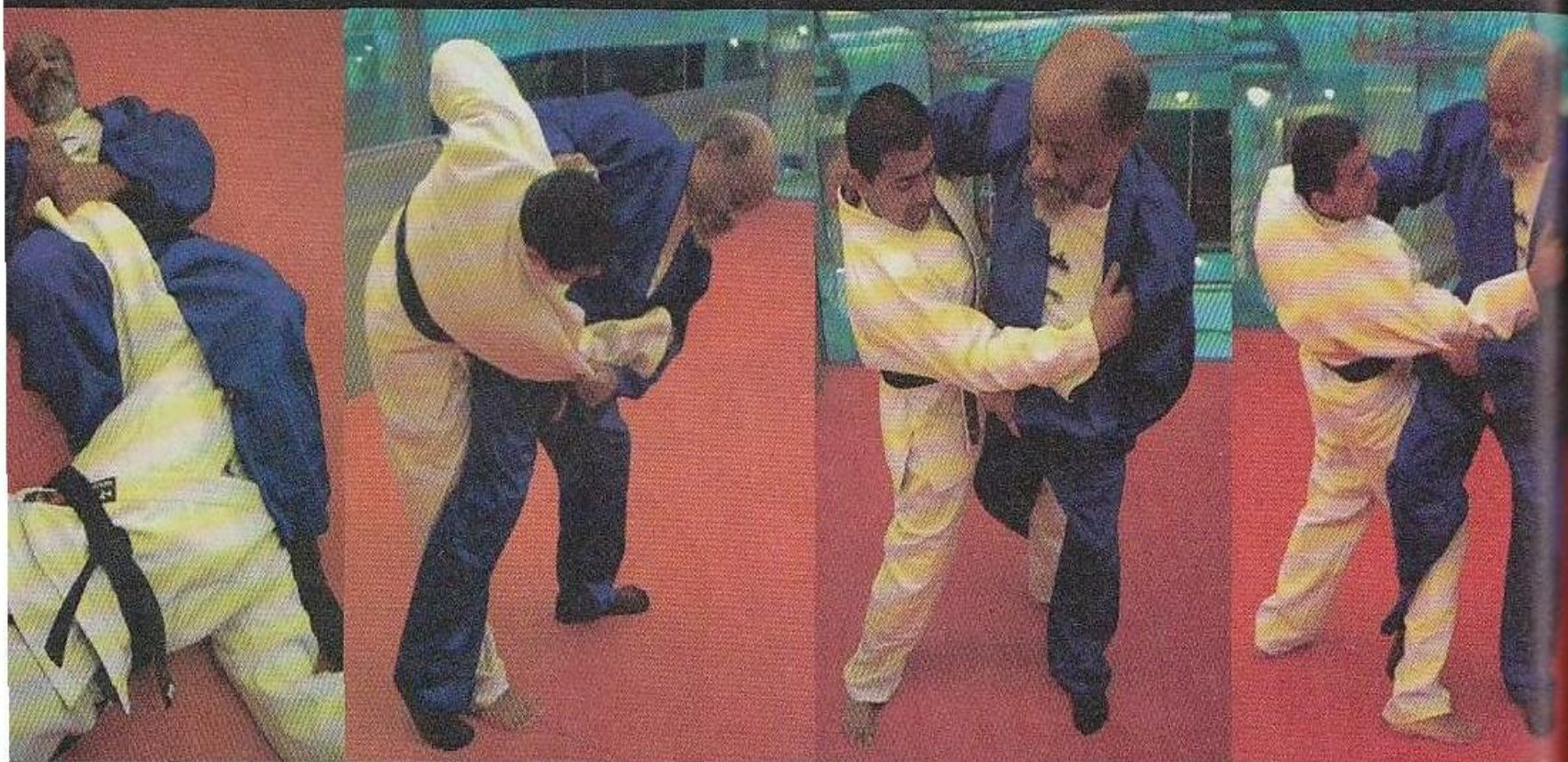
JG: Basically, Bruce was challenged by a Karate/Judo Black Belt. The man was a pretty skilled fighter who prided himself on engaging in street-fights. He was said to have gone against guys with knives in the street and won. He was about Bruce's height but weighed a little more and they fought at the downtown Seattle YMCA. The fight lasted eleven seconds and the people who were there were Bruce, the Karate man and two of his friends, Ed Hart, Howard Hall and me. In the past other people have talked as if they were there but these were the only people who were present.

When the fight ended the Karate man's skull was cracked from above his eye down into his cheekbone.

AJT: How do you think Bruce Lee would have done in a Mixed Martial Arts competition, if they had existed back then, against grapplers such as the Gracie family (Brazilian Jiu Jitsu)?

JG: Bruce would have never gone into mixed martial arts competitions because he wouldn't have thought that it was real fighting. Any situation that prevented him from using any and all of his weapons would be unthinkable. Bruce had several fights in Hong Kong before he came to the US and he was always more concerned about proving things to himself than proving things to other people. In any situation where his life was on the line Bruce would have been a dangerous opponent for anyone.

AJT: What do you think when some people say that Bruce Lee was one of the original innovators of mixed martial arts cross training stemming from the Seattle years having had





Left, left to right  
Bruce Lee Judo demo  
with Jesse Glover

Bruce Lee, Seattle,  
Judo practice

Bruce Lee, Seattle,  
Judo gi

Below  
Judo Seattle poster  
designed by Bruce Lee  
1960

Bottom, left to right  
Arm bar as used by  
Bruce Lee in *Enter  
The Dragon*

Ashi-guruma

Hane-goshi

Osoto-gari

Seoi-nage

Shimewaza (Choking)

Jesse hip throw  
(O Goshi)

Jesse with arm lock  
(Kansetsuwaza)

students like yourself, Ed Hart (Judoka and ex-professional boxer) and Leroy Garcia (boxer and wrestler)?

JG: While it can be said that Bruce had an interest in many aspects of martial arts, my feeling is that basically he was a hand and a foot guy who would use punches, kicks and finger jabs in a real confrontation. While Bruce had the reflexes to be a good grappler I don't think that he would have wanted to go to the ground in a fight. I can remember him when he was talking about fighting grapplers, that if he was ever taken down in a fight he would take out his opponent's eyes as he was going down.

AJT: Thank you for this interview and would you like to add anything else?

JG: I would like to thank Red Lizard for providing me with the T-shirts and Hayashi for providing me with their Judo Gis, their sponsorship is very much appreciated. Mr Chris Kistan and The Third Space gym in London for the use of their facilities to demonstrate my techniques. Also my UK student Seyfi Shevket for conducting the photo shoot and yourself for partnering me in the photo shoot. Lastly, MAI for their continued support and promotion. I hope to see you all at my August 13th & 14th 2005 seminar in London!

Hayashi Gis available from [www.budostoreuk.com](http://www.budostoreuk.com) T-shirts available from [www.red-lizard.co.uk](http://www.red-lizard.co.uk)

For private training, classes, close protection training and seminars in Jesse 'Glover's Non Classical Gun Fu' contact UK Sifu Abdul J Tarafdar Email: [ajtarafdar@hotmail.com](mailto:ajtarafdar@hotmail.com) or [www.spiritwingchun.com](http://www.spiritwingchun.com)

